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**Indian “Strategic Restraint”: Revisited
The Case of the 1965 India-Pakistan War**

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Introduction¹

“India has been too understanding when it comes to Pakistan,” quipped a senior serving Indian intelligence official interviewed in early 2017. “We do not have the will to hurt them like they hurt us.” In fact, he underlined, “we have never been willing to do this.”² In many respects, the argument that India is and has been less willing to use military force across its borders is one shared by practitioners and scholars alike.³ Following the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, reportedly, officials and especially the then Indian National Security Advisor were aghast that the government – and specifically the prime minister – decided against retaliation.⁴ On reflection, and having thought through the consequences of employing military force, the then Foreign Secretary concluded “more was to be gained from not attacking Pakistan than from attacking it.”⁵ For many however this was simply another example of Indian political leaders’ more natural preference for inaction. “Did we get anything from the restraint we displayed after Mumbai?” asked one retired general in a closed-door meeting six years after the attacks.⁶ That there were sound strategic reasons for restraint in 2008 has done little to change a commonly held view that India and its political leaders are cagey about using force.⁷

In the more recent past, the debate around strategic restraint re-emerged on Indian television screens and across English and vernacular dailies following reports of “surgical strikes” (on September 29, 2016) against terrorist launch pads “along the Line of Control” that divides Indian and Pakistani administered Kashmir. These “strikes,” according to the Indian Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) were conducted to “pre-empt infiltration by terrorists” based in *Azad* Kashmir or Pakistan Administered Kashmir. The existence of such launch pads and their use by terrorists contravened, according to the DGMO, “Pakistan’s commitment in January 2004 not to allow its soil or territory under its control to be used for attacks against India.”⁸ Making it clear that India’s action was a break from the past, a government spokesperson argued, “Days of the so-called strategic restraint are over.”⁹ Insider

accounts of the “surgical strikes” suggest that Indian forces delivered “a tight, hard slap to the Pakistan army and its proxies.”¹⁰ The ability to use force effectively across India’s borders was said to reflect Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ability to think “beyond the norm” of restraint.¹¹

For some scholars, India’s apparent fixation with strategic restraint can be traced to the very foundation of the modern Indian state. Its political leadership, the argument goes, “has generally seen military force as an inappropriate instrument of politics.”¹² These scholars stress that “reticence in the use of force as an instrument of state policy has been the dominant political condition for Indian thinking on the military.” “One of the remarkable attributes,” they argue, “of India as an independent nation has been its longstanding restraint in military strategy.”¹³ India, according to this line of argument has been found lacking in “strategic assertion” or the ability to take the initiative in times of war to change the strategic balance in its immediate neighborhood.¹⁴ Drawing on these assumptions, both political theorists and political scientists have long argued that India lacks an “instinct for power,” which is understood “to be most palpable in the realm of the military.”¹⁵ Unlike other rising powers, India is said to have failed “to master the creation, deployment, and use of its military instruments” to support and secure national objectives.¹⁶

Accordingly, these writers suggest, that strategic restraint in India is shaped primarily by its political leaders’ aversion to using force. In turn, historically, this aversion has played a key role in robbing the opportunity for strategic assertiveness, they argue. Hence, whilst the India-Pakistan war of 1971 and the subsequent birth of Bangladesh were celebrated as a great victory in India, scholars argue that strategic restraint stopped “New Delhi” from pressing “its military advantage in the west to resolve the Kashmir problem.”¹⁷ India’s delay in sending troops to rescue Jammu and Kashmir from armed tribal raiders in 1947-48 is used as yet another example of Indian leaders’ discomfort with the use of force.¹⁸ For the most part, the debates around

strategic restraint have been muddled by a weak appreciation for military and diplomatic history in India.¹⁹

Revisionist accounts of the 1971 War and the history of the conflict in Kashmir make clear that Indian leaders – both political and military – were hardly averse to the use of force. Political objectives set the context in which force was to be used. Attaining these objectives had little to do with “reticence” and a lot more to do with issues such as limited capabilities – this was especially apparent towards the end of the First Kashmir War; the risks associated with escalation; and the need to maintain both national and international legitimacy. Historical accounts using multiple archival sources make clear that by the middle of 1948 the Indian military was hard pressed to stock and support the war effort against Pakistan. This was one of the reasons why Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took the decision to approach the United Nations to solve the conflict.²⁰ Opening a second front in 1971 to “resolve the Kashmir problem” was never an option for Indian political leaders. The costs of doing so far outweighed any imaginable benefit.²¹

There is a palpable disconnect between the assumptions held by certain political scientists and analysts with regards to Indian political leaders’ supposed aversion to the use of force and the empirical record of India’s actual experiments with the use of force. The lack of attention to new, revisionist, and easily accessible histories of India has led to the construction of a debate around strategic restraint that is inherently binary: between reading Indian decisions with regards to the use of force as one best defined by indecision, unwillingness and something to be considered in the very last resort, and a shift away from restraint to the more liberal and unhindered application of the use of force. Hence, the pressing questions asked by some political scientists are simple ones: will India ever abandon strategic restraint? What drivers may serve to “overcome historical restraint?”²² To some extent, these are false questions based on problematic premises.

Such questions presuppose Indian political leaders' aversion to the use of force. These assumptions and the hypothesis on restraint derived from the same are largely ahistorical. The works are based on a cursory reading of Indian military and diplomatic history. As such, strategic restraint – said to be informed by Indian political leaders' unease with the use of force – is considered to be a given. This article contests what it believes to be a reductionist position on strategic restraint. Instead, it argues that Indian strategic restraint has in fact been shaped more by structural issues such as the limited availability of logistics and capabilities, the impact of domestic political contest, the effect of international attention to a crisis and the need for international legitimacy, and the political, economic, and military cost-benefit analysis associated with the use of force and the potential for escalation. In sum, it contributes a historically grounded understanding of strategic restraint. It argues that whilst structural issues have shaped India's approach to the use of force, its political leaders have in fact been more than willing to utilize the military arm in times of crises. The paper shows that the largely accepted argument – highlighted above – that strategic restraint has been driven by political disinterest and unease with the idea and reality of force is a chimera based on a weaker appreciation of Indian diplomatic and military history.

The article looks closely at India's decision-making process in one major experiment with the use of force against Pakistan in 1965. The case clearly shows that political leaders were hardly uncomfortable or unsure about the use of force. In fact, it was the military leadership at the time that sought to temper the ambitious and potentially escalatory policies considered by the then prime minister. The case demonstrates political primacy over military means. It also shows how limited capabilities; international demands for a ceasefire, and the threat of intervention on the part of China played a much larger role in shaping political decisions.

Further, it provides food for thought for further research and why, perhaps, it is essential to return to the drawing board on the issue of strategic restraint that is widely used but with little

sense of what exactly drives restraint. To understand strategic restraint, there is a greater need to re-read available revisionist accounts of Indian military and diplomatic history, explore newly declassified sources, as well as reframe such histories to forensically deconstruct India's experiments with the use of force.

The decision to choose the 1965 case study was prompted by two factors. First, it is one of the least studied conflicts in South Asia. Unlike the 1948 Kashmir War,²³ the 1962 Sino-Indian War,²⁴ and the 1971 India-Pakistan War,²⁵ there is almost nothing on 1965 that is sourced from the archives. Second, much like in 1948 and 1971, those making a case for political uneasiness – with the use of force – as a central source for strategic restraint lightly suggest that in 1965 India did not press the advantage leaving the “strategic condition unchanged.”²⁶ Whilst the 1965 War is hardly the centerpiece of these scholars' hypotheses, it is certainly a part of the broader narrative that suggests that Indian political leaders have historically failed to take the strategic advantage because of their unease with the idea and reality of using force. As this article shows, this was hardly the case. Yet, the intent is not to untie looser empirical points of argument with those who *use* history rather than *do* history. It is simply to make the case that the benchmarks used to construct Indian strategic restraint is a lot less stable than suggested. Given the scope of the essay, it stays clear of the Nehru years, this period has been covered in depth by existing scholars using relatively new sources.²⁷ Lastly, this essay does not address the impact nuclear weapons have had on strategic restraint. The debate over whether or not the introduction of nuclear weapons has structurally induced restraint is well covered in the growing literature on the same.²⁸

In the end, the essay attempts to recover Indian strategic restraint by bringing the complexities of political decision-making in times of war back to the forefront of debate. Further, it highlights the importance of thinking more carefully about the limitations placed on the use of force by logistical factors, capabilities, and the pressures on political leaders by domestic and

external audiences. Further, it looks closely at the question of escalation, and the need to control escalation when the costs far outweigh the benefits.

Testing “Restraint” in 1965

Context

On August 5, 1965, a villager from the Poonch district in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) spotted a group of armed fighters camping in a forest close to the Indian side of the Ceasefire Line (CFL). He informed the local Indian Army. By 7.30 that evening an Army patrol took-up positions against the “raiders.” The first contact began a little after.²⁹ Pakistan’s master plan – codenamed Gibraltar – was immediately foiled. From the outset, the idea was simple and had been in the making since December 1964. Aziz Ahmed, the Pakistani Foreign Secretary and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Foreign Minister, were convinced that instability and despair amongst the local population in J&K presented Pakistan with an opportunity to incite rebellion against Indian security forces.³⁰ For two years, between 1963 and the end of 1964, the Indian government and the local Kashmiri administration contended with popular uprisings and street protests. In part, this had to do with the imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah, the first prime minister of Kashmir following the princely state’s accession to India. Jailed by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1953, Abdullah was briefly released before Nehru died in 1964. He was in fact in Pakistan to explore the potential for a solution to the Kashmir conflict when news of Nehru’s death reached Karachi. Anger on the street was further sparked by the theft of a relic known as *Hazrat Bal* – a strand of hair said to belong to the Prophet Mohammad – from a shrine in Srinagar.³¹

Further, a limited conflict with Pakistan across the border at the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat earlier in 1965 left Ahmed and Bhutto, and to a lesser extent President Ayub Khan, with the impression that India had little appetite for war. In January and February, Indian police patrols along the border found that Pakistani Rangers had occupied a key post in an area known as

Kanjrakot, believed to be on the Indian side of the border.³² Pakistani troops were two kilometers inside Indian Territory, according to Indian Platoon Commanders in the area.³³ The first major contact took place on April 9. By the third week of April, General J. N. Chaudhuri – the Indian Chief of Army Staff – confessed that he was “faced with a crisis.”³⁴ Pakistan had deployed US-made M24 Chaffee Tanks in “squadron force.”³⁵ The active fighting had moved swiftly from Kanjrakot to a thirty-mile stretch.³⁶ Chaudhuri was in no mood for a fight, neither was the army prepared for anything more than a limited skirmish. At the time, the army did not have the required capabilities in place in Kutch, especially the required armor, to counter Pakistan’s deployment of tanks. In fact, India’s own Soviet-made T-76 tanks were being un-crated in Ahmednagar in the state of Maharashtra, hundreds of kilometers away from the frontline in Kutch. Chaudhuri appealed “for US assistance in restraining escalation,” since Pakistan’s use of the M24 tanks violated a prior agreement between Washington and Islamabad that defense acquisitions from the US would not be used against India.³⁷ L. K. Jha – the Secretary to Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri – told British diplomats that India was hopeful for a quick end to the conflict. Shastri, he argued, was looking for “good officers” to finalize a ceasefire settlement.³⁸ British Prime Minister Harold Wilson stepped in. On May 5, and following many rounds of negotiations between British envoys – acting as intermediaries – in both New Delhi and Karachi, a *de facto* ceasefire was announced in Pakistan.³⁹ An agreement was signed on June 30 and a formal ceasefire was in effect from 0530 hours in Pakistan on July 1. Essentially, both sides agreed to return to positions held by them prior to January 1, 1965.⁴⁰ A tribunal was created to settle the matter of the border dispute, which it eventually did in February 1968.⁴¹

The conflict over the Rann underscores three key points in the context of the outbreak of war later in 1965 and the question of restraint. First, there is little doubt that India’s inability to muster the required forces and capabilities to counter Pakistan’s incursion in the Rann reinforced the view held by some elites in Pakistan – like Ahmed and Bhutto – that India under Shastri had

little desire for war. Equally, as Gul Hassan, the Pakistani Director of Military Operations, confessed, “The high command of our army was intoxicated by our showing and our morale could not possibly have been higher.”⁴² Chaudhuri had made clear that India could do little in the face of Pakistani armor, especially as it had none of its own in the Kutch area.⁴³ As the official Indian historians of the war succinctly put it, “For India the Kutch operation was the [*sic*] wrong war with the right enemy, at the [*sic*] wrong place. For Pakistan, it was a victorious war, with the [*sic*] wrong lesson – that it could win a cake-walk victory in Kashmir.”⁴⁴ Second, and relatedly, it was the military, and specifically the Chief of Army Staff, that pressed the political leadership for a diplomatic solution. The sheer lack of capabilities and the potential for arbitration led by the UK convinced Shastri that diplomacy was a strategically wiser option than escalation. Chaudhuri had little hesitation in telling Chester Bowles (the US ambassador to India), “this restraint is [an] asset we will try to cultivate.”⁴⁵ The Army Chief in fact made clear to the political leadership that war in the Kutch area “would have been a great mistake.” India had no airfields in the area and land communications were poor, apart from the fact that the monsoons would soon flood the Rann.⁴⁶

Third, the role played by the UK was central in Pakistan’s calculations in executing Operation Gibraltar. Ayub understood Wilson’s willingness to play the role of an honest broker as an indication that the international community would not allow an India-Pakistan standoff to escalate. The president signed off on Gibraltar on July 24, 1965, with the view that actors outside South Asia would control escalation. Ayub was wrong. Following the Kutch agreement Wilson had argued that “Britain’s frontiers” extended themselves till the Himalayas.⁴⁷ Yet, when war broke-out in September, he, much like President Lyndon Johnson, outsourced the resolution of the conflict to the United Nations (UN) and later to the Soviet Union. The war in Vietnam and Wilson’s well-aired differences with Johnson’s approach in South East Asia more broadly mattered a lot more than the conflict in South Asia.⁴⁸ Ayub might be blamed for deluding

himself of the West's inevitable intervention, but Prime Minister Wilson equally fed the Pakistani president's predilections. Further, Ayub was convinced that closer relations with China – forged since 1963 – would contain India's desire for escalation.⁴⁹

With these predilections and a false sense of security (at least when it came to western intervention), regular troops trained by Pakistan's 12 Division based in Murree were clothed as non-state guerrillas and inducted into J&K. Several groups of men were to contact local leaders, supply anti-Indian propaganda, and incite rebellion.⁵⁰ Little did these men realize that at the time neither was there a want for rebellion nor any appetite for Pakistani support. By August 8, Indian military intelligence uncovered the entire plan.⁵¹ Arrested "guerrillas" confessed that the "Pak objective [was] to cut [the] LOC, blow up bridges...create as much disturbance as possible and then say [the] situation is a popular armed uprising by Kashmiris."⁵² In fact, Indian envoys posted across the world were sent pictures – by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs – of the captured infiltrators to share with international audiences. The aim was to make clear from the outset that Pakistani soldiers disguised as irregular fighters had crossed the CFL and infiltrated into Indian administered Kashmir.⁵³ As for Shastri's government, the initial objective is difficult to ascertain. What is available is an order by the Defense Minister – Y. B. Chavan – to Chaudhuri "to take effective action to seal the passes that were used by the infiltrators." Doing so would mean occupying two key ingress routes in Pakistan administered Kashmir. Chavan sent Chaudhuri a formal order to this effect on August 19.⁵⁴ The army – and specifically the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of 15 Corps – suggested waiting till reinforcements arrived before making the attempt to capture the passes. 15 Corps had lost one of its Brigade Commanders and a part of the headquarters following an attack on an ammunition dump. The suggestion was immediately thwarted. Chaudhuri made clear that the operation was necessary from a political standpoint.⁵⁵

To be sure, members of the Indian opposition were up in arms. News of two schools burnt by “Pak intruders” made headlines in India on August 10.⁵⁶ Sabotage and ambushes were reported in different parts of the Valley. General Nimmo, the UN Chief Military Observer in Srinagar, corroborated the reports. As for Pakistan, and as per script, Bhutto publicly stated, “the people of Kashmir had only intensified their liberation struggle.” “The responsibility for that,” he argued, “could not by any stretch of imagination be attributed to Pakistan.”⁵⁷ The *Jan Sangh* (the predecessor of the BJP) held anti-Pakistani demonstrations. Effigies of Ayub and Bhutto were burnt on the streets. “Gibraltar forces” was the term commonly used to describe the infiltration in the Indian press.⁵⁸ On August 16, Defense Minister Y. B. Chavan told parliamentarians that “the complicity of Pakistan in this whole affair” was clear.⁵⁹ Under pressure in parliament and from the opposition, and with an eye on the manner in which the infiltration had been covered in the press, Shastri ordered Chaudhuri to seal the two passes mentioned above. In fact, and with the view to take the battle to the enemy, the Indian army commenced “prevention action” in Kargil, north of where the major infiltration had taken place. The objective was to capture three Pakistani posts and secure communication lines between Srinagar and Leh in Ladakh, closer to the border with China. The *Haji Pir* Pass was captured soon after.⁶⁰

The Indian army had crossed the CFL in two specific points.⁶¹ The decision to do so had been taken as early as August 13. The political leadership’s resolve was clear.⁶² As the first stage of this conflict came to a close with the capture of passes across the CFL and the government’s first major set of orders – provided on August 19 – were met, the choice for escalation, as a report for the *New York Times* put it, rested with Pakistan.⁶³ Chester Bowles reached similar conclusions as Gibraltar had failed in its entirety. Bowles surmised:⁶⁴

For time being we believe that GOI [Government of India] has carefully limited its responses to Pak incursions and that escalation likely to be gradual and limited to CFL

area. However if other side makes major push, there will be substantial risk of punitive action along East Bengal border or large-scale action in Jammu/Punjab area.

As for Wilson and the prospect of British intervention, sources in Whitehall made clear that they did not believe that the UK “[could] usefully attempt any mediation role at this time.”⁶⁵ Keeping in mind the need to fight and talk at the same time, Shastri made sure to have the Kutch agreement endorsed in the Indian parliament. By doing so, he also made clear that the conflict in the Kutch was one issue, and the infiltration across the CFL another. Diplomatic negotiations remained the preferred option to deal with the former, whilst the use of military force was the chosen advance in the case of the latter.⁶⁶ Further, much was to be gained in terms of international support, he argued, as far as continuing with the Kutch agreement was concerned. The outcome of the tribunal in 1968 validated Shastri’s gamble taken amidst the heat and dust of sharp domestic contest at home during those testing August days.

Escalation

At 0600 hours on September 1, a Pakistani armored column – consisting of ninety American tanks – entered Chamb, on the Indian side of the CFL. The CIA’s message to the White House situation room said it all: “Pakistani army invasion of India.”⁶⁷ Operation Grand Slam had commenced. The objective was to capture Akhnoor, about thirty kilometers from Jammu. Doing so would cut off Indian forces from the rest of Kashmir.⁶⁸ The Akhnoor Bridge connected key areas along the border from military bases in Jammu and Pathankot.⁶⁹ As the Pakistani 1st armored Division made its way to Chamb, the Pakistani Air Force (PAF) attacked Indian positions on the road to Akhnur.⁷⁰ On the next day, Chamb fell to Pakistan.⁷¹ The Indian army was unable to bring forward their Centurion Tanks, which were too heavy for the bridges between Jammu and Akhnur.⁷² On the back foot, the Indian 191 Infantry Brigade called in air

strikes.⁷³ That same afternoon, the PAF bombed Jammu. The situation on the ground was so unpredictable that UN flights in and around the area were diverted to Amritsar in Indian Punjab.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Pakistani forces crossed what is known as the International Boundary – or what Pakistan calls the “working boundary” – between Jammu and Sialkot, a city in Pakistani Punjab.⁷⁵

Under these conditions, and in light of Pakistan’s deep penetration close to Akhnoor, the Indian Cabinet met on September 3 to discuss contingencies. Finally, Shastri outlined the government’s objectives to his three service chiefs. They were:⁷⁶

(a) To defeat the Pakistani attempt to seize Kashmir by force and to proclaim that Pakistan would never be allowed to wrest Kashmir from India.

(b) To destroy the offensive power of Pakistan’s armed forces.

(c) To occupy minimum Pakistani territory necessary to achieve these objectives. It would be vacated after the satisfactory conclusion of war.

On September 5, Shastri met India’s Chief Ministers. He asked for their approval in moving Indian forces across the International Border close to Lahore. This was a mere formality, aimed especially at those who represented the border states of Punjab, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. Shastri made clear that the “Chamb area and the Punjab could not be defended if the Indian army was on the defensive.” He stated that he could no longer “live from ceasefire to ceasefire.” Further, the fate of Akhnoor and potentially India’s ability to defend J&K lay in the balance. By the end of the meeting he had the political support he desired for “full approval” to Chaudhuri “to choose the timing and targets for his operations.”⁷⁷ Late that night, Indian forces crossed the border. On September 6, Shastri told the Indian parliament that “in order to forestall the opening of another front by Pakistan, our [Indian] troops in the Punjab moved across the border in Lahore Sector for the protection of the Indian border.”⁷⁸ Almost immediately, and much to the relief of Indian forces in Akhnoor, Pakistan’s 6 Armoured Division and 7 Infantry Division withdrew to

protect a defensive line between Lahore and Sialkot, the focus of India's approaching 1 Corps.⁷⁹ Expecting a swift response from Pakistan, Surface to Air Missile complexes were placed in different parts of New Delhi. The war on the border had come home to the Indian capital.⁸⁰

General Harbaksh Singh, the General-Officer-Commanding of India's Western Command prepared his forces to attack two fronts across the border in Pakistan: Lahore (Operation Riddle led by XI corps) and Sialkot (Operation Nepal by I corps).⁸¹ In the Lahore sector, Pakistani forces defended their positions behind the Ichogil canal. 120 feet wide and fifteen feet deep, this was a formidable obstacle for approaching Indian forces. In addition, by September 10, Pakistan's 10 Division had destroyed most bridges on the canal.⁸² India's aim was to threaten Lahore, potentially capture Pakistani territory (to be used as leverage in political bargaining in the future), and "destroy the war potential" of Pakistani forces between Lahore and Sialkot.⁸³ Fighting on this front intensified with large tank battles, unseen, as it is often said, since the Second World War.⁸⁴

In the meantime, Pakistan attacked and captured the Indian border town of Khem Karan (on September 8). It would come to be called "Patton Nagar," after the 97 Patton tanks destroyed here by India.⁸⁵ By September 12-13, India's offensive in the Sialkot sector forced Pakistan to withdraw its 5th armored Brigade from the front in Lahore.⁸⁶ The opening of a second front in Sialkot, thought Chaudhuri, would directly relieve pressure in the Chamb sector.⁸⁷

In keeping with India's political leadership's decision to inflict pain on Pakistan till such time that a status quo of sorts was restored, an informal "political embargo" on the use of air power was lifted on September 1, following the execution of Grand Slam.⁸⁸ The PAF had an estimated 260 aircraft or 17 squadrons, including the F-104 Starfighter. The IAF had some 26 Fighter squadrons on their books. Effectively however, only seventeen were deemed fit for service.⁸⁹ Further, India was yet to receive around 24 MIG 21s from Russia out of a total order of

38. The CIA estimated that even if these arrived in time to fight Pakistan, “India was not known to have sufficient pilots trained on the MIG 21 to operate three more squadrons.”⁹⁰

The air war escalated quickly. Ayub ordered his Air Chief (Air Vice Marshal Nur Khan) to conduct operations as he saw fit. The result was astounding: 35 out of 59 IAF planes were destroyed whilst on the ground. The primary reasons for this had to do with logistical and technological issues such as the lack of shelters, insufficient radar coverage, and “too many aircrafts clustered at one base.”⁹¹ So poor were the IAF’s logistical arrangements that at times – in Pathankot and Amritsar – the PAF “caught the IAF re-fueling in line abreast, thus presenting an ideal target.” Twelve aircraft were immediately destroyed or damaged in one instance.⁹²

For the remaining part of the war, the IAF focused on protecting its bases against further pre-emptive attacks. What is clear is that despite the political leadership’s desire to use air power to support offensive operations in places like Lahore, the lack of training and the surprise attacks against the IAF’s bases forced it to focus more on defensive operations such as combat air patrols. As one former Indian Air Commodore put it: “the lessons learned in 1965 were all negative ones.”⁹³ As a lessons-learned report authored for the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and other agencies put it, the IAF’s attacks did not appear “to have had much success and subsequently strikes were not concentrated and the IAF seem to have dissipated their efforts in small raids and attacks over a wide area.”⁹⁴

On September 13, and following a two-day battle, the Indian army broke a “large Pakistani armored thrust south of Lahore.”⁹⁵ Two days later, Indian forces were seven kilometers inside Pakistani territory. Indian artillery was in a position to attack Lahore.⁹⁶ Around the same time, India took control of the railroad link between Sialkot and areas linking Pakistan’s defense systems.⁹⁷ Yet, and despite the Indian advantage on the ground, India had lost 612 personnel and 50-60 tanks.⁹⁸ There was much confusion on the Lahore front. As one Indian officer put it: “a clear military stalemate exists.”⁹⁹ Ayub asked for direct US intervention based on the “Kutch

model” discussed above.¹⁰⁰ Yet, as far as India’s political leadership was concerned, this was the precise opportunity to cripple Pakistan’s military machine. On September 15, Chavan told staff at the US embassy that the Indian objective “is to inflict maximum damage on the Pakistani military machine.” Indeed, the US defense attaché in Karachi argued, “if the Indians press their attacks, the Pakistanis will be faced with the possibility of a complete and humiliating collapse of their army and air craft.”¹⁰¹ Yet, and despite the defense minister’s forthright position, and the potentially devastating prospects of continuing Indian attacks against Pakistan, much changed on the political and international front between September 13-17.

Ceasefire

The question of restraint came into sharp focus towards the end of the 1965 war. As mentioned above, the defense minister seemed certain that an Indian offensive could continue. Chaudhuri’s Corps Commanders allegedly told their Chief (on September 13) that they could complete the objective and destroy Pakistan’s offensive capabilities if the war was allowed to continue for another ten days.¹⁰² As Chavan’s Secretary R. D. Pradhan writes: “the aggressor [Pakistan] was let off lightly.” A UN-brokered ceasefire was accepted on September 22, according to Pradhan, “when India was still capable of continuing the fight, and when the enemy was showing signs of complete exhaustion.”¹⁰³ The official Indian historians of the war provide little by way of insight as to why the government of the day chose to accept the ceasefire when it did. If this was, as Chaudhuri later claimed, a war of attrition, then why stop short of destroying Pakistan’s offensive capabilities in total,¹⁰⁴ especially as it became publicly clear that Ayub was desperate to end the conflict.¹⁰⁵ Two sets of reasons explain Shastri’s decision to end the conflict and accept a ceasefire. Neither of these had to do with his timidity, or, as commentators in the current milieu insist, an innate disinclination amongst India’s early leaders to use force to attain political objectives.

First, by the second week of September, international calls for an UN-brokered ceasefire had gained momentum. UN Secretary General U Thant visited Pakistan and then India. On September 4, the Security Council passed a resolution requesting both sides to respect the sanctity of the CFL. By September 10, Russia, one of India's principle international economic partners called for peace. Leonid Brezhnev publicly offered Moscow's good offices to end the conflict.¹⁰⁶ Shastri made clear to Wilson, Johnson, and other world leaders that there was no question of his government negotiating away parts of J&K beyond what had been inked in the 1949 ceasefire agreement.¹⁰⁷ Following U Thant's visit to India on September 12-13, Shastri once again declared, "defensive operations in which our armed forces are engaged must continue with unabated vigour." In private, officials told Bowles that India had agreed to U Thant's ceasefire proposal. The Indian government had not yet made their acceptance public. They would do so after getting required assurances from Pakistan that its army units would withdraw to its side of the CFL. Once Pakistan agreed, India was willing to return its forces to *its* side of the CFL, in accordance with positions held prior to August 5, 1965.¹⁰⁸

Given India's stronger military position on the ground, the political leadership convinced Thant that any Pakistani conditions – such as solving the Kashmir dispute – attached directly or indirectly to the ceasefire proposals would be rejected outright.¹⁰⁹ Ayub was finally forced to withdraw such demands. Even the loud call for a plebiscite had been formally removed from the ceasefire proposal.¹¹⁰ This was, as Shastri made clear to Thant, nothing more than a "simple ceasefire" proposal that also guaranteed the "cessation of hostilities."¹¹¹ On September 21, the details of the ceasefire were announced in New York. A withdrawal of forces agreement was entered following the Russian-backed meeting in Tashkent in January 1966. The withdrawal itself was completed by the end of February 1966.¹¹² It was clear to Shastri that the war had achieved its basic aims, of securing J&K. Areas such as Khem Karan and Chamb – under Pakistani control – would be returned to India.

Second, there was a likelihood of Chinese intervention if the war continued. De-escalation, they argued, would be wise given what reporters then called the “China-Pakistan axis.”¹¹³ During a visit to Pakistan in February-March 1965, Chou-en-Lai stated, “the future of Kashmir should be settled in accordance with the wishes of the people.” Taking Pakistan’s side, the Chinese Premier mooted the case of self-determination. As Indian troops crossed the International Border in early September, Chinese leaders claimed that this was a sign of “out and out aggression” on the part of India. In fact, Chinese officials stated that there was no “question of Pak infiltration and armed conflict was entirely provoked by India.” The so-called freedom fighters in Kashmir were said to be fighting a “National Liberation Struggle.”¹¹⁴ As India’s XI corps reached the outskirts of Lahore, the Chinese sent a protest letter (or “ultimatum”) to India.¹¹⁵ India was asked to dismantle its military infrastructure on its border with China or “face grave consequences.” This, according to Swaran Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, was a matter of “grave concern.” For his part, and with the view to assuage China, Shastri stated in parliament that “in order [not] to give the Chinese an excuse for an attack on India, we have no objection to such a joint investigation of our defense installations in Sikkim as proposed by China.”¹¹⁶

As far as the US was concerned, the main red line for the Chinese was Indian military engagement in East Pakistan, and potentially deeper penetration in the west in and around Lahore. It was for these reasons that Indian envoys in London, Washington and Moscow were all urged by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to accept a ceasefire proposal as fast as possible.¹¹⁷ For US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, this was a matter of “great concern.”¹¹⁸ In a note written a month after the ceasefire, the Indian Charge de Affaires in Peking – Jagat Mehta – made clear to his political masters in New Delhi that the fact that China was “prepared to make a demonstrable use of power” was a matter of “historical political conflict.”¹¹⁹ What worried India most was Chinese military entry through “Pak held Kashmir,” which would allow the “Red

Army to attack Kargil and cut off India's Division in Ladakh." The US confirmed that 97,000 Chinese troops were stationed in Tibet and Sinkiang together.¹²⁰ By September 16, Chinese forces were found in strength on the border with Sikkim with an infantry Division moving from Lhasa to the Chumbi Valley area near the border with India and Bhutan.¹²¹ It is for these reasons that whilst India deployed three Divisions in West Bengal, Shastri made clear that India had "no quarrel with East Pakistan."¹²²

In the final analysis, the 1965 war was hardly a case where restraint – outlined by authors and commentators as doing little or disfavoring the use of force – drove Indian decision-making. Rather, as evidenced above, strategic restraint was reinforced once India achieved its primary goal (of securing J&K) and only when external factors (such as the threat of Chinese intervention) limited Indian choices. It could of course be argued that the Chinese threat was over-stated. However, and even if this was the case, there were no good strategic reasons to keep fighting. As Chaudhuri himself indicated in his autobiography, occupying a "big city" [Lahore] would require manpower that India did not have. Equally, as the Chief of Army Staff astutely noted, destroying city centers does little for countries that are neighbors, "delaying eventually the ultimate aim of living in amity."¹²³

Conclusion

This study challenges the fundamental assumption that Indian political leaders' disinclination to use force across India's borders serves as the primary source for Indian strategic restraint. The case shows that restraint was in fact shaped by issues such as limitations in capabilities, especially during the conflict in Kutch in April 1965, and the threat of external intervention – from China – in September 1965. Indian political leaders' approach was hardly antithetical to the large-scale use of force. The primary aim of the 1965 case study has been to prompt a re-think about the underlying assumptions that are said to shape Indian strategic

restraint. Further, it has been to outline the need to more carefully study and analyze the limitations of capabilities; political *and* military leaders' appreciation of costs, benefits and the potential for escalation; international factors and the political understanding of third-party military intervention. In turn, each of these factors shapes strategic restraint, much more so than political leaders' apparent inborn discomfort with the use of force. In sum, this study has made a modest and perhaps less-than eloquent attempt – especially for those more invested in the approach rather than the story – to return some meaning to strategic restraint.

As Eliot Cohen makes clear, another Mumbai-like attack on India may well prompt Indian military retaliation against Pakistan. Worryingly, he argues, “Indian military and civilian officials believe that their retaliation for such an attack could be limited.” “They,” Cohen continues, “may misjudge the potential for escalation.”¹²⁴ Historical cases sourced directly from the archives can help better understand the perils of escalation, and how past leaders have dealt with the same. Relatedly, historical case studies do well to outline the importance of the fog of war, and the extent to which a short military campaign can be shaped by domestic political contest and political leaders' perception of what is popular and what is not.

In his seminal study on perception and misperception in international politics, Robert Jervis begins by asking a seemingly simple question: do decision-makers' perceptions matter? How easy or difficult, Jervis wrote, is it to distinguish between the “world as the actor sees it” and “the world in which policy will be carried out?” The key problem, Jervis surmised, is that “decision-makers assimilate evidence to their pre-existing beliefs without being aware of alternate explanations.”¹²⁵ In the contemporary Indian context, it is all-too-evident that Indian decision-makers see no difference between the world as they see it and the one in which their policies will be carried out. Bent on moving away from strategic restraint (or at least their rather narrow interpretations of it), the idea is to strike harder when and if provoked. The experiment with “surgical strikes” in September 2016 reinforced the view that the LoC is less of a red line

than otherwise assumed. This approach has clouded any significant discussion on and around matters of strategy. By definition this requires us to think more carefully about potential limitations of capabilities, international factors, the need for legitimacy, and costs and benefits and reactions or escalation. This is all the more pressing at a time in India when the military instrument and its use are increasingly seen to benefit domestic political aspirations.

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⁵ Shiv Shankar Menon, *Choices: The Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), p. 62.

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- ¹²⁰ Rusk to Bowles, Washington DC, September 19, NSF, Box 129, LBJA, India Vol. 5/6:65-9:65.
- ¹²¹ The India-Pakistan War 1965, May 1966, NA, DEFE 44/102.
- ¹²² CIA to WHSR, September 8, 1965 (1400 hrs), NSF, Box 129, LBJA, India Vol. 5/6:65-9:65.
- ¹²³ Chaudhuri, *An Autobiography*, p. 189.
- ¹²⁴ Eliot Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power & the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), p. 164.

¹²⁵ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1976), pp. 3-5 and p. 409.